

Fwe language

Fwe, or **Chifwe**, is a Bantu language spoken by 10,000 people along the Okavango River in the Zambezi region of Namibia and in the Western Province in Zambia. It is closely related to Kuhane, and is one of several Bantu languages of the Okavango which have click consonants.

Although under the pressure of Lozi and Kuhane (Subiya), Fwe speakers tend to have a positive attitude towards Fwe, and speaking Fwe is often considered an important part of one's identity,^[4] and thus underscores the vitality of the language.^[5]

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Regional variation

Main phonological differences between Zambian and Namibian Fwe, as noted by both the speakers and seen in the data:^[6]

| Zambian Fwe | Namibian Fwe |
|--------------------------------|--|
| loss of clicks | maintenance of clicks |
| overgeneralization of /l/ | /l/ only as conditioned allophone of /r/ |
| epenthetic [h] frequently used | epenthetic [h] rarely used |

Morphological differences between Zambian and Namibian Fwe:

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Fwe | |
| cìfwè | |
| Region | Zambezi region, Namibia and Western Province, Zambia |
| Native speakers | 10,200 (2006) ^[1] |
| Language family | Niger–Congo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Atlantic–Congo ▪ Benue–Congo ▪ Southern Bantoid ▪ Bantu ▪ Botatwe ▪ Subia ▪ Fwe |
| Language codes | |
| ISO 639-3 | fwe |
| Glottolog | fwee1238 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/fwee1238) ^[2] |
| Guthrie code | K.402 ^[3] |
| Person | màfwè |
| People | cìfwè |

| | Zambian Fwe | Namibian Fwe |
|----------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| past | <i>na-</i> | <i>a-</i> |
| reflexive | <i>kí-</i> | <i>rí-</i> |
| remote past | <i>na-</i> | <i>ni-</i> |
| remote future | <i>na-</i> | (á)rá- |
| inceptive | <i>sha-</i> | <i>shi-</i> |
| connective | PP - o | PP - a |
| persistive | <i>shí-</i> | <i>shí-/sí-</i> |
| negative imperative | ásha- | ásha-/ásá- |
| negative infinitive | shá- | shá-/sá- |
| negative subjunctive | <i>sha</i> | <i>sha-/sa-</i> |
| near future | <i>mbo-/mba-</i> | <i>mbo</i> |

Phonology

Consonants

Consonant inventory of Fwe^[7]

| | | Bilabial | Dental/ Labiodental | Alveolar | Postalveolar/ Palatal | Velar | Glottal |
|--------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| Click | plain | | [l] [g l] | | | | |
| | prenasalized | | [n l] [n l] | | | | |
| <u>Nasal</u> | | [m] | | [n] | [n] | [n] | |
| Stop | voiceless | [p] | | [t] | | [k] | |
| | voiced | [b] | | [d] | | [g] | |
| | prenasalized | [^m p] [^m b] | | [ⁿ t] [ⁿ d] | | [ⁿ k] [ⁿ g] | |
| Fricative | voiceless | | [f] | [s] | [ʃ] | | [h] |
| | voiced | [β] | [v] | [z] | [ʒ] | | |
| | prenasalized | | [^m f] [^m v] | [ⁿ s] [ⁿ z] | [ⁿ ʃ] | | |
| Affricate | plain | | | | [tʃ] | | |
| | prenasalized | | | | [ⁿ tʃ] [ⁿ dʒ] | | |
| <u>Tap</u> | | | | [ɾ] | | | |
| <u>Glide</u> | | | | | [j] | [w] | |

- The plosives /p b d g/ are considered peripheral phonemes, as they are relatively infrequent in the lexicon. They are not reflexes of *p, *b, *d and *g as reconstructed for Proto-Bantu, but mainly appear in loanwords.^[8]
- Though there are numerous cases where /h/ contrasts with zero, i.e. where /h/ can-not be omitted, [h] is also often used as an epenthetic consonant, in which case it freely commutes

with [w], [j] and zero. Phonemic /h/, on the other hand, cannot commute with a glide nor can it be dropped.^[9]

Vowels

Fwe has five contrastive vowel phonemes: /ɪ ʊ ε ɔ a/.

References

1. Fwe (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/fwe/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
 2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Fwe" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/fwee1238>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
 3. Jouni Filip Maho, 2009. New Updated Guthrie List Online (<https://web.archive.org/web/20180203191542/http://goto.glocalnet.net/mahopapers/nuglonline.pdf>)
 4. Gunnink 2018, p. 4
 5. Gunnink 2018, p. 5
 6. Gunnink 2018, p. 5, 6
 7. Gunnink 2018, p. 11, 12
 8. Gunnink 2018, p. 13
 9. Gunnink 2018, p. 19
- Gunnink, Hilde (2018). *A grammar of Fwe: a Bantu language of Zambia and Namibia* (PhD thesis). Ghent University. [hdl:1854/LU-8553074](https://hdl.handle.net/1854%2FLU-8553074) (<https://hdl.handle.net/1854%2FLU-8553074>).

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